***"Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth." John 17:17***

***" We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." 2 Thessalonians 2:13.***

***"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 2 Corinthians 6:9-11***

If you've been given new life in Jesus Christ, you were chosen purely by grace, before the foundations of the world, called by God to salvation, justified by faith, and adopted into the family of God. This paper is specifically written for your consideration. If you do not have a relationship with Jesus, please stay and read on. I believe you may find that our gracious and loving God, who knows you and all your specific needs, desires for you to know and trust Him today.

Our topic of study is holiness. Although it is not a word often heard in everyday conversation, it appears many times in the Word of God. But what does it mean? We do know that it is essential because the Bible tells us we must have it if we hope to see the Lord. The author of the letter to Hebrews writes, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be ***holy***; without ***holiness*** no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Usually, when we hear the word, it is used without any relation to its biblical context. Growing up, I loved the game of baseball. There was a popular broadcaster who announced games for teams in Saint Louis and Chicago. His name was Harry Caray. He was beloved by many fans and was an excellent baseball broadcaster. He had a well-known signature call or catchphrase that fans enjoyed. Whenever a player from the team he announced for hit a home run, he screamed out in his excitement, "Holy Cow!" No doubt, that phrase was not an original saying of Harry's. The point is that the biblical meaning of the word is foreign to many people in today's society. We also, at least in Western culture, often hear the word "holy" used in a profane manner. For example, in Harry Carry's homerun call, the word "cow" is frequently substituted with an expletive that isn't worth hearing! The result of this is that a vast number of people have no idea what the word "holy' actually means.

The Bible's use of the word holy, or holiness, in its basic root form means to "set apart" or "separate." When we read in Scripture that God is holy, we are saying that He is separate from all evil and sin. The holiness of God is fundamental to His nature and impacts all of His attributes. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that God is holy. We read that the holy angels in heaven worship and adore the triune God (one God revealed in three persons) as they cry out, "***Holy, holy, holy***, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). The Old Testament prophet Isaiah had a vision and experienced a similar scene in heaven. This is how he described what he saw and heard in his encounter with God.

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "***Holy, holy, holy*** is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." (Isaiah 6:1-5).

These verses help us understand the Bible's use of the word "Holy," which signifies being separate and set apart. God's essence, perfections, and attributes are all far greater than His creation. In this way, He is separate and set apart from everything and everyone. There is none like God who is worthy of praise. In some ways, God's holiness is undefinable!

The Christian author A.W. Tozer once stated that he struggled to come up with a definition of holiness. He said, "When we think of the holiness of God, we cannot comprehend it, and we certainly cannot define it. Holiness means purity, and purity means that it is unmixed, there is nothing else in it."[1] The prophet Jeremiah sums it up for us like this, "There is none like you, O Lord; You are great, and your name is great in might. Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you" (Jeremiah 10:6-7). The prophet understood that God was far greater than he could fully understand! God is set apart from all His creation!

Now, the question we must answer, which is, of course, the purpose of this study, is how a sinner, saved by the grace of God, can be holy? The Bible's answer is sanctification. Since God is holy, Christians are also called to be holy. This is not optional! Believers in Christ are called to

[1] A.W. Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2018) 155

be set apart from sin and evil, reflecting holiness for the glory and honor of their Savior. In John 17, Jesus prayed to His Father, asking that His followers (all believers then and in the future) would be sanctified. He prayed, "***Sanctify*** them in the truth; your Word is truth" (John 17:17). The "truth" Jesus refers to is the infallible and inspired Word of God, which encompasses both the Old and New Testaments.

This study on sanctification continues a series focused on God's work in the redemption of sinners.[2] All prior studies provide a list, often referred to in Reformed theology as the "order of salvation."[3] This list serves as a framework within theology, outlining a logical sequence of events through which God applies the benefits of Christ's redemption to His people. It is essential to note that this logical sequence is viewed from a human perspective. As time-bound individuals, we perceive these truths as a sequential process. The eternal God, who knows the end from the beginning, has no limitations regarding time or sequence! The current study considers the seventh event from our list. For your reference, the complete list of the "order of salvation" is provided below.

1) Election refers to God's choice of people to be saved.
2) The Gospel Call (God calling sinners out of darkness).
3) Regeneration (being born again).
4) Conversion (faith and repentance).
5) Justification (right legal standing).
6) Adoption (membership in God's family).
7) **Sanctification (proper conduct of life).**
8) Perseverance (remaining a Christian).
9) Glorification - Death (going to be with Christ).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (#35) poses an important question that deserves our attention. It can serve as a "working definition" as we continue in our study. Question: What is sanctification? Answer: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed

[2] All prior studies can be found here: https://reedrusniak.academia.edu/research#papers
[3] The Latin term, *ordo salutis*, (Order of Salvation), was in prominent usage during the Protestant Reformation.

in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live unto righteousness.

We begin our study with the traditional (biblical) understanding that sanctification has two fundamental categories. The first is called **definitive sanctification**. The second is known as **progressive sanctification**. Our paper will be divided into these two intrinsic categories.

## *Definitive Sanctification*

In our previous studies on the topics of election, calling, regeneration, conversion, and adoption, we noted that each of these glorious acts of God is only necessary once. In other words, God elected His people before the foundation of the world. He effectually called them to Himself, regenerated them through new birth, provided the grace necessary for conversion, and once and for all, adopted them into His family. All of these occurrences were unique and happened only once. As we approach sanctification, we still observe this one-time activity. However, unlike the other aspects of redemption, there will be a continuous or progressive activity for Christians to engage in as they live their lives in a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is known as progressive sanctification and will be discussed later in this paper.

The late Westminster Seminary professor John Murray helps us understand the distinction between the two aspects of sanctification. He writes, "We are thus compelled to take account of the fact that the language of sanctification is used with reference to some decisive action that occurs at the inception of the Christian life, and one that characterizes the people of God in their identity as called effectually by God's grace. It would be, therefore, a deflection from biblical patterns of language and conception to think of sanctification exclusively in terms of a progressive (or ongoing) work."[4] It is this "***decisive action that occurs at the inception of the Christian life***" that we will now focus on.

We should begin by acknowledging that our sanctification, or our holiness, is found in the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone. It is because Christ is holy that Christians are also holy. This is made so because of the believer's union with the Lord. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author explains why believers are considered holy. He writes, "Then he said, Here I am, I have come to do your will. He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will,

[4] John Murray, Vol. 2 *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977) 278

we have been ***made holy*** through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:9-10). Through the sacrificial death of Jesus, believers are "***made holy"*** the moment they are born again.

In our study on justification, we learned that the righteousness of Christ has been credited or imputed to the believer. As a result, the Christian is considered righteous in the "eyes" of God. Similarly, we can also say that in definitive sanctification, God views Christians as holy because of their union with Christ. This is the foundation of definitive sanctification! Jesus is the rock of our salvation! The writer in the Old Testament understood this. He wrote, "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice, A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he." (Deut. 32:4). Believers at the time of regeneration are set apart for God; in this sense, they are holy.

Often in the Apostle Paul's letters, he addresses them to the "saints" at such and such a city. One example is Paul's greeting to the church in Colossae. He writes, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ***to the saints*** and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father" (Colossians 1:1-2).

Another example is Paul's greetings to the church in Corinth. "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those ***sanctified*** in Christ Jesus, ***called to be saints*** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

In both examples of the apostle's greetings, Paul refers to the "saints." It should be understood that the definition of the word saints in the New Testament Koine Greek is "holy ones."[5] These are the believers in Christ whom God has sanctified, or set apart, and He considers them the "holy ones."

The Catholic Church has diluted the term "saint" by elevating specific individuals to a higher level of piousness, which they call "sainthood." There is no biblical warrant for this action! Scripture makes it clear that all believers in Jesus Christ are saints.

As with all aspects of redemption, God, by His grace, mercy, and love, makes it possible for sinners to become holy. Sanctification is the supernatural work of Almighty God. Let me

[5] ἁγίοις is the common Koine Greek word translated in English to either "saints" or "holy ones."

remind you, dear Christian, that this is not about how you feel. Our feelings change all the time. The believer is set apart for Christ from the moment of regeneration. This is true regardless of how you feel on any particular day! Louis Berkhof writes on the nature of this sanctification. "It consists fundamentally and primarily as a divine operation in the soul, whereby the holy disposition born in regeneration is strengthened and its holy exercises are increased."[6] In this description from Berkhof, he first speaks of the definitive nature of sanctification, stating it is a "divine operation in the soul." Then, by God's grace, based on a new disposition of the Christian, the process of progressive sanctification begins with what Berkhof calls "holy exercises."[7]

In writing to the saints in Corinth, the Apostle Paul reminds them of their former selves before they were set apart (made holy) for God. He reflects on their state when they were outside of a relationship with Christ, and indifferent to the things of God. In other words, they did not care about their souls before they were born again. He writes, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, ***you were sanctified***, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The apostle links regeneration and justification to sanctification! He reminds his readers that God performed a mighty act in their lives through His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, they were regenerated (born again) and justified (seen as righteous by God because of Christ's righteousness), they were made holy![8]

To summarize our thoughts on definitive sanctification, Scripture proclaims that Jesus Christ is the foundational source of the believer's holiness. Definitive sanctification is a work of God's grace in a person's life. A.W. Tozer once said, "Holiness is not based on the things we do or do not do. We have erred tremendously in this area and have caused great harm to Christianity. We are not seeking so much holiness as we are seeking the Holy One."[9] Tozer is exactly right to stress that the holiness of the Christian is found in the Holy One (Jesus Christ)!

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[6] L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941) 532
[7] Berkhof is referring to growing in Christ by exercising faith and repentance in our walk with the Lord.
[8] ἡγιάσθητε – (ἁγιάζω – "holy") is the Greek root. The verb is Aorist, Passive, Indicative, 2nd Person, Plural– meaning the work of sanctification has been accomplished in the past by God.
[9] Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer,* 155

Our study has revealed that the believer has been "made holy." At conversion, the believer is set apart for God and is holy (sanctified) due to the holiness of their Lord and Savior. In the overall order of salvation, Jesus serves as the great representative of humanity. His perfect, sinless life as a man, His obedience, suffering, and sacrificial death form the basis for the Christian's sanctification.

## *Progressive Sanctification*

So far, our study has primarily focused on the once-and-for-all sanctification granted to the redeemed in Christ at the moment of their new birth. This work of God is always accompanied by an ongoing process in which the Christian becomes increasingly transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This progressive change in the believer is evident from the Apostle's letter to the Corinthians. He writes, "And we all, with unveiled face, behold the glory of the Lord, ***are being transformed*** into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Becoming increasingly like Jesus is the goal of progressive sanctification.

The Scripture affirms in no uncertain terms that becoming more like Christ in our Christian life is the will of God. "For this is the ***will of God***, your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Becoming like Jesus in His love, compassion, self-denial, humility, hatred of sin and evil, and reverence for His heavenly Father are goals and objectives for Christians.

The believer may wonder, considering that they still have a sinful nature and that the world, the flesh, and the devil continually tempt them to sin, how can I grow in the likeness of the Lord Jesus? The wonderful answer that the Scripture gives us is the Holy Spirit. This is the "Helper" that the Lord Jesus Christ promised in the Gospel of John. Jesus said to his followers, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another ***Helper***, to be with you forever, even the **Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:15-17). It is God, the Holy Spirit, that Christians desperately need and who has been abundantly provided to them in their new birth!

Earlier in our study, we noted that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of our sanctification. If Jesus is the source, we can say that the Holy Spirit can be understood as the "agent" of our sanctification. What is an agent? Looking up the word in a dictionary provides two definitions: 1) An agent is one that acts or has the authority to act. 2) An agent is one who is empowered to act for or represent another. The Holy Spirit serves as an agent, representing the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit applies the Word of God to our lives and brings to remembrance what Christ has said and done! Working as our agent, sanctification is the process through which the Holy Spirit applies the attributes of Christ to the hearts and minds of believers, allowing Christians to "be conformed to the likeness of his Son' (Romans 8:29).[10]

In the creation account found in the first chapter of Genesis, we are told that God made man in His image. "So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). When sin entered the world, we can say the image was not entirely removed but rather significantly tarnished. The purpose of the believer's sanctification is to restore that image to its untarnished state and to align it with Christ's likeness. This will never be perfect until glorification and the believer is with the Lord, but the goal is an untarnished state.

Earlier in our study, we read from Hebrews chapter 10 that Christians are "**made holy"** at the time of regeneration, or being born again. We noted that this represents the aspect of definitive sanctification. In that same section of Hebrews, chapter 10, the author also conveys that sanctification is an ongoing process. In the context of Christ, our Great High Priest, offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, the writer states, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who ***are being sanctified***" (Hebrews 10:14).

The Holy Spirit is actively working in the believer, and because of His work, the believer must strive to be holy! John Murray provides an invaluable comment that helps us see the balance between God's work and the Christian's pursuit of holiness in life. Murray writes, "God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required results. God works in

[10] Notice the link with God's predestination. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son"

us, and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works, we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. And this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is pleasing to him."[11]

The New Testament teaches that Christians are set free from sin. We see this in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been ***set free from sin***, have become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18).

At the same time, the Apostle Paul acknowledges that sin remains present in the lives of believers and that they must continue to fight against it. He writes, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness (Romans 6:12-13).

The process of sanctification varies significantly among Christians. The Holy Spirit is given to all the redeemed, but maturity in Christ likeness varies from person to person. As in all aspects of redemption in Christ, there is mystery. All believers should expect conflict against their sinful desires and the enemy of our souls (Satan). A.W. Tozer writes of this conflict. He states, "Wherever the holiness of God confronts unholiness, there is conflict. This conflict arises from the irreconcilable natures of holiness and sin."[12]

As those whom the blood of Christ has saved, we should thank God that there is no judicial condemnation[13] when we fall into sin. When sin occurs, we confess our sins, repent, and strive not to repeat them. God is "faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There will always be a conflict in the hearts of believers as long as they remain in this world. In *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, John Murray is so helpful on this subject. He writes, "The presence of sin in the believer involves conflict in his

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[11] John Murray, *Redemption Accomplish and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980) 148
[12] Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer,* 157
[13] Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

heart and life. If there is remaining, indwelling sin, there must be the conflict which Paul describes in Romans 7:14ff. It is futile to argue that this conflict is not normal. If there is still sin to any degree in the one indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then there is tension, yes, contradiction, within the heart of the person."[14]

Scripture teaches that the comfort and peace of the Christian life come from growth in holiness. As long as we have breath, this will always be a battle. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, stated, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Galatians 5:16-17). Dear Christian, do not think that it is strange that sins still occur in your life. Your duty is to fight it and, by grace, destroy it! The great 17th century English Pastor and Theologian John Owen wrote, "Do you mortify[15]; do you make it your daily work; be always at it while you live; cease not a day from his work; **be killing sin or it will be killing you**."[16]

Much of the New Testament is devoted to guidance for the churches on how believers in the body of Christ should live their lives in a holy manner. This guidance is abundant in the vast majority of the Apostle Paul's letters as well as in the works of other writers. James 1:22 tells us to "be doers of the word and not hearers only." Peter advises us to "Be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). Believers are to "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:10). Always remember that the evidence of being in Christ is shown out in our daily lives!

The means of sanctification is, as discussed earlier, the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the Spirit of God, the believer in Christ has the responsibility to mortify sin. This is made very clear by the Apostle Paul writing to the church in Phillipi, where we see both the work of the Lord and the believers. He writes, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, ***work out your own salvation*** with fear and trembling, for it is ***God who works in you***, both to will and to work

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[14] Murray, *Redemption Accomplish and Applied*, 144-145

[15] The "mortification of sin," or to "mortify sin" was a very common phrase in the 17th century Puritan era. It means to put to death sin!

[16] John Owen*, The Works of John Owen, Volume 6: Temptation and Sin,* ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 9

for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). It is essential to note that the salvation Paul refers to in this passage is not the salvation the believer has already obtained through conversion. The apostle is referring to spiritual maturity, achieved by growing in obedience to the Lord's commands.

Christian, are you struggling with sins that always seem to defeat you? Let me ask you a few questions. Are you spending time in the Word of God daily for your devotions? Are you regularly reaching out to the Lord in prayer? Have you confided in and sought assistance from a mature believer? Are you attending a strong, Bible-believing church that preaches the Word of God with love and faithfulness? Are you a member of such a church, guided by mature elders who humbly and lovingly seek to assist you on your journey? Are you striving to serve the Lord and others in whatever large or small ways you can? Remember, you were bought with the precious blood of Christ and are God's "workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 3:10).

Towards the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, after in-depth instructions on how a Christian should strive for holiness, the Apostle concludes his letter with a metaphor of a soldier suited up in armor, ready for the fight. Believers, in battle against sin and the evil one, will greatly profit by taking heed to these words!

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:10-19).

Dear Christian Reader, press on to know the Lord![17] This passage from the letter to Ephesus encourages you to gather your strength to live a life of faith by equipping yourselves with the "armor of God." How fitting this metaphor is in the life of faith! The enemy of our

[17] See Hosea 6:3

souls, the power of darkness, is like a lion seeking to destroy you. This is the imagery Peter uses in his first letter when he writes, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). However, with God’s armor on, you are ready to do battle! You have all you need. You have truth, righteousness, readiness from the gospel, faith, salvation, and the word of God. Finally, it is of vital importance to recognize that our blessed Savior has accomplished our victory! Take confidence, dear brother or sister in Christ, for “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

## When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood

See, from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all

Author – Issac Watts, 1707